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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 2006
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 2014
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1640
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1267
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 1033
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0941
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000158

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: NWFP: TWO WEEKS AFTER SWAT'S OPERATION DECLARED OVER,
SECURITY VARIES IN "TWO SWAT'S

REF: ISLAMABAD 1731

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two weeks after the government of Pakistan declared the end of its military operation in Swat and invited the return of internally displaced Swatis, the picture of security in Swat is mixed. Around half of Swat's IDPs have returned, but the distribution of the returns is skewed toward Lower Swat. South and west of Mingora, Swat's largest city, returns by formerly displaced residents are close to complete, security is relaxed, and life seems to be returning to normal. Around Mingora, a heavy military presence and, until recently, long curfews have helped ensure a lack of militant activity. North and east of Mingora, army operations and militant attacks continue, particularly in the areas of Matta and Kabal. The continued insecurity in central Swat has delayed IDP returns and created a political vacuum that will affect both of the "two Swats." End Summary.

IDPs Returning

¶2. (C) On July 8, the government of Pakistan declared that Operation Rah-e-Rast, its name for its two-month-long military campaign against militants in Swat, was completed. On July 13, the government began assisted returns for Swat residents into the district. According to the Emergency Response Unit (ERU), as of July 28 approximately 77,558 displaced Swati families have returned to Swat, approximately half of the total number of verified registered IDPs from Swat. This overall positive trend, however, masks significant variations between regions of Swat.

Lower Swat Coming Back

¶3. (C) USG assessments, press reports, and post contacts all present a consistent picture of "two Swats." In Lower Swat, to the south and west of Mingora, population has generally returned and markets are functioning. An American-staffed USAID/OFDA team which traveled through Lower Swat to Mingora on July 16, shortly after the operation's end was announced, found limited

damage (other than to certain government buildings and certain houses of Taliban supporters) and relaxed security, and estimated that 20-40 percent of the region's population had already returned. More recent assessments by Post contacts in Lower Swat estimate that virtually all of the population of the towns in Lower Swat have returned, although the situation in rural areas is not entirely clear.

Mingora Safe Under Heavy Military Presence

14. (C) In Mingora and nearby Saidu Sharif (the district headquarters), Post contacts estimate that approximately 75 percent of residents have returned. Strict military control of the city and surrounding urban area, however, has until very recently inhibited the movement of Mingora's inhabitants and dampened commerce. Curfew began to be lifted for 10 hours each day only within the past week, and the Pakistani army within the past few days has begun to take down some of their checkpoints that had previously dotted key intersections in the city, creating serious traffic jams. The city is filled to overcrowding with returning IDPs - both those originally from Mingora and a very large number of those from further north and east, who have not been able to return to their home areas because of ongoing military operations and general insecurity. The Mingora area has been relatively free of militant violence for the past several weeks. In certain pro-militant suburbs of Mingora such as Kanju, however, clashes still occasionally occur as the military conducts search operations.

Above Mingora, Security Uneven

15. (C) North and east of Mingora, strict security measures have meant that until very recently, there have been no humanitarian assessments - the lack itself a measure of how

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different the situation is from Lower Swat. There is no complete consensus on the level of returns; while a USAID/OFDA implementing partner which visited the central Swat on July 27 reported that approximately half of the pre-conflict population along the main road between Charbagh and Matta were present (reftel), post contacts who visited their home villages in Central Swat reported that few people had returned; most of those present had never left in the first place. Both sources agree that the level of devastation in these areas is higher than in Mingora and Lower Swat, and that it increases as one travels further up the valley. (Note: Beyond Matta, in thinly-populated and non-Pashtun Upper Swat, post knows of no assessments. The relatively minimal conflict reported, however, implies that damage is less extensive.)

16. (C) The primary strongholds of the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) in Swat prior to Operation Rah-e-Rast were the areas of Kabal, just north of Mingora; Charbagh, ten kilometers to the east of Mingora; and - principally - Matta, in central Swat. Militants took effective control of these areas in 2007, well before their activities affected much of the rest of Swat, and residents fear that the relatively low level of opposition that they presented to the army during its operation reflected their deliberate strategy to slip away and begin again. According to Swat district nazim Jamal Nasir, only in Charbagh was the intensity of combat commensurate with the known population of militants operating in the area.

"Army has the Hilltops and the Valleys, But Nothing In Between"

17. (C) The Pakistani press has reported daily clashes between Pakistani troops and militants in rural areas of central Swat - particularly in the areas of Matta and Kabal - over the past two weeks. Post contacts confirm that outside of the principal towns and roads, militants continue to be active. The report of Qaimoos Khan, a former NWFP Provincial Assembly member and landowner in Khwazakhela (near Matta, where significant

fighting took place during the initial phases of the operation), is typical. Qaimoos reported that some of his relatives who had briefly returned to their homes had almost immediately received threat letters. He said that while the army in the area occupied all of the strategic high ground and had checkpoints on the roads, it has virtually no presence in the villages around the town of Khwazakhela. Sher Shah Khan, a principal leader in the Bandai area of Kabal tehsil, has had two relatives kidnapped in the past two weeks despite a significant army presence in his home village, a hotbed of militant activity before the operation.

Comment: Patchy Security and Swat's Political Vacuum

18. (C) As families have begun to return to Swat in substantial numbers over the past sixteen days, two very different pictures of Swat have emerged. One is of a district where militants have been vanquished, residents are returning and starting to rebuild, and commerce is flowing. The other is of a district with significant issues, where militant activity continues to deter returns, stifle commerce, and create fear of a return of extremists as soon as the Pakistani military moves on to its next fight. Both pictures are correct. Despite undeniable progress by the government of Pakistan in driving militants out of the most populated areas of Swat and the relative peace and normalcy that has returned to some regions, securing the peace throughout the district is a challenge that it has not yet fully faced. The patchy security situation in Swat is in some ways a return to 2007, when militancy was concentrated in rural areas in central Swat where tensions were high between the major landlords and those who worked the land, before the insurgency spread to central Swat's cities and then to the south. As those areas of current militant concentration correspond closely to the homes of most of the political leadership of Swat, the distribution of violence seems likely to create a political vacuum in the "two Swats" for the near future (septel).

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